THE MADONNA OF THE TUBS

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

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"THEY WAS FRIZ TO THE OARS, SO I *HAD* TO KEEP A-ROWIN'." See page 88.

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THE MADONNA OF THE TUBS

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

WITH FORTY-THREE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

ROSS TURNER AND GEORGE H. CLEMENTS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1895

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge:
Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.

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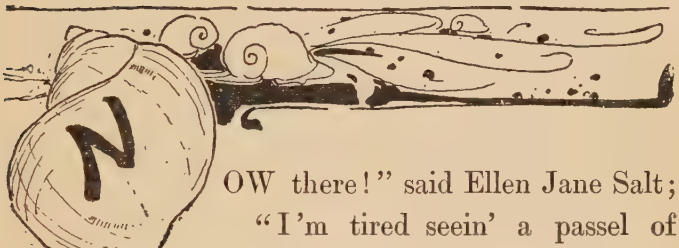
THE MADONNA OF THE TUBS.



"NOW there!" said Ellen Jane Salt; "I'm tired seein' a passel of folks squealin' at a snail shell."

It happened that much the same view of the case was occupying Miss Helen Ritter at the same moment; the chief difference being that the summer boarder's view was not dependent upon expression, while that of the "native" (as usual) was.

It was what is called a burning fog that day. Miss Ritter was sitting on the cliff under a Japanese umbrella. Twenty people were sitting under Japanese umbrellas. Hers, she thanked Heaven, was of ivory-color, plain and pale. No Turkey red

flaunted fiercely nor purple mandarin sprawled hysterically against indigo skies above her individual head. There is a comfort in distinction, even if it go no farther than a paper sunshade. Miss Ritter enjoyed the added idiosyncrasy of sitting under hers alone. She was often alone.

In July the seaside is agreeable; in September, irresistible; in October, intoxicating. In August, one does not understand it: one comes up suddenly against its "other side," as against peculiarities in the character of a friend known for years, and unexpectedly putting the affection to a vital test.

In August the sun goes out, and the thick weather comes in. The landlady is tired, and the waitress slams the plate; the fog-bell tolls, and the beach is sloppy; the fog-whistles screech, and one may not go a-sailing; the puddings and sauces have grown familiar, and one has read too many novels to stand another, and yet not enough to force one back, for life's sake, on a "course of solid reading." In August one's next neighbor is sure it was a mistake not to spend the season at the mountains. In August the babies on the same corridor are sick. In August one has discovered

where the milk is kept, and frightful secrets of the drainage are gossiped in ghastly whispers by the guests, who complain of the dinners when the young married lady who rowed by moonlight with another fellow has left the place and a temporary deficiency of scandal. In August one's own particular beach is swarming and useless, one's especial reef is populated and hideous, nay, one's very

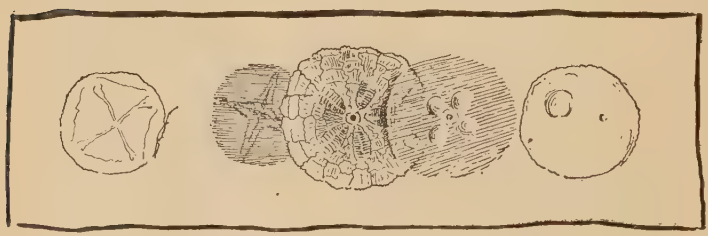
crevice in the rock is discovered and mortgaged to the current flirtations, and all nature, which had seemed to be one's homestead, becomes one's exile. In August there are hops, and one wants to go away. In August there are flies, and the new boarder.

It is the new boarder who is overaudible about the snail shells. Down there in the gorge, where the purple trap glitters at half-tide in great volcanic veins that seem to pulsate yet through the cliff with the fire imprisoned there — who knows when? — and where the beaded brown kelp deepens to bronze, and then runs to tarnished gold in the wet, rich, pulpy recession of the ebb, the new boarder aboundeth. So the snail — brown, green, orange, lemon, gray, and white — the tiny shells, mere flecks of color, moved sluggishly by their cell of hidden consciousness and will, like certain larger lives that beneath a mask of stagnation palpitate. The snails, as I say, interest the new boarder. He saunters down in groups, in clans, in hordes, defiling through the trap gorge — disproportionately feminine, sparsely but instructively masculine, and eternally infantile. He views the attractions of the spot first enthusiastically, then calmly, now indifferently, and drifts away at the third stage of feeling, possibly an object of curiosity or envy, in his turn, to the snail, who has to stay. The first day he screams (I must be pardoned if I use the generic masculine pronoun in this connection) at the snails; the second day he

observes them without screaming; the third he does n't observe them at all. His number is infinite, and his place is never vacant. His lady types wear wild roses in their belts, invariably succeeded by daisies, and rigorously followed by golden-rod. It is an endless procession of the Alike, or, we may say, of the great North American Average.

Decidedly on the fortunate side of the average is the element that is creeping into Fairharbor — one should say stepping in, for that end of averages never creeps, to be sure — the element not vociferous over snails, and scantily given to floral decoration; an element represented, for instance, by Miss Ritter, who, seeking Fairharbor for many a summer because, among other reasons, it gave her that closest kind of seclusion, isolation in a crowd with which one has not historic social relations, has sadly discovered of late that her dear, rough, plain rocks and waves and boarding-houses are becoming semi-fashionable, with a threat even of classically abandoning the compound. Already Fairharbor has her hotel and her daily steamer, her band and her "distinguished visitors," her mythical company, organized to sweep up the huge solitudes

at five dollars a foot, roadway forty feet wide thrown in, and wells if you can find any water in them. Already she has her landaus and her toilets, her French maids and her ladies who protect the complexion. Already the faithful old stagers, haughtily unconscious, are stared at for their thick boots and beach dresses and gorgeous coats of tan, and their way of sitting in the sand like crabs after their vigorous baths, in which they do *not* jump up and down, but swim sturdily, battling with the sharp North shore waters, and not expected to scream.



"A CONSPICUOUS FIGURE ON THE CLIFF'S EDGE." See page 9.

ISS RITTER, a conspicuous figure on the cliff's edge above the lava gorge, might be called an unconscious link between Fairharbor past and Fairharbor to be, possessing perhaps the better points in both types of "summer people," luxuriously dissatisfied with them, with herself, with the world, even just now with Fairharbor. In her white flannel dress and white hat, with the pale flame-colored tie at her throat, and the reflection from the pale sunshade upon her, she had a select, almost severe look, which was not lessened by any depreciation of effect in motion when she rose and walked. She had a stately walk, and reminded one of a calla, as she turned her head slowly and stood full to view, tall and serious.

There was no sunset that night; it was a dog-day, damp and dead; the fog had thickened, and was crawling in like fate; the bell tolled from the light-house two miles away, and the east wind bore the sound steadily in.

Already the boarder children, who insisted on going in the skiff, could not be seen an eighth

of a mile out at the island's edge beyond the lava gorge; and the fisherman, whose children knew better, pushed them with a kiss from his knees as he drew in his dory for the rescue, to comfort a distracted parent (in a red parasol) and another

one (rumored to be a clergyman, but just now in a bathing suit), whose inharmonious opinions but harmonious anxiety were the excitement of the hour upon the beach. The bathing suit had, unhappily for him, allowed the children to go. The red parasol had always said they would be drowned.

"Don't ye fret," said the fisherman, with a slow grin. "They stole my old punt, an' she leaks so 't 'll keep 'em busy bailin', and they *can't* get fur. I'll fetch 'em this time, but next time keep 'em to hum. Why, there ain't a *dog* in Fairharbor 'd set out rowin' thick as this, 'thout he hed to go for a doctor or see to his trawls; he 'd *know* better. But you land-lubbers never do know nothin'; you don't know enough to know when *to* be skeered. — H' are ye, Miss Ritter?" as she passed him, suddenly gliding down the cliff, and up the wet, uncordial beach.

"That 's like you, Henry. Your tongue is bound to take the edge off your good deeds somehow, like plated silver, whereas you know, half the time, it 's the solid thing underneath. Now you 'll scour the ocean after those children, and do just as well as if you had n't scolded about it."

"Better — a sight better!" chuckled Henry. He ran splashing through the water over his huge red leather boots, pushing the dory off with a mighty shove. He moved the oars with a fisherman's superb leisure; his massive figure looked as if it were etched for a moment on the mist, whose color and the color of his old oil-clothes blurred

together till there seemed to be only the outline of a man. As boat and boatman grew dimmer to the view, the ghostly rower turned and shot back one parting word at the red parasol: —

"Look a-here! Jest you stop yowlin', won't ye? You 'll *skeer* them young 'uns overboard. Ef you want me to fetch 'em, lemme do it in peace."

With this, the fog, with whose terrible and mysterious swiftness no man may intermeddle, shut down.

"Like the curtain of death," Miss Ritter thought, looking over her shoulder, when man and boat and voice had vanished utterly. She was not given to too much consideration of the lot of her fellow-

men, perhaps; her sympathies were well regulated, but not acute. Although from Boston, she was not a philanthropist by avocation; she took people as they came, or went — good-naturedly enough, but not uncomfortably; she had a touch of the irresponsibility belonging to professional artists; she herself did not even paint tea-cups.

IN Fairharbor, for instance, it would have been easy to make one's self miserable. She meant to treat her neighbors as a lady should; but why cultivate neuralgia of the emotions over the fate of the fleets? It was therefore hardly characteristic, and struck her for the moment, in an artistic sense, curiously, as part of the "effect" of the whole wet, dull afternoon, that she should feel almost moved by the every-day incident of Henry and the dory and the fog. He seemed to her suddenly like a symbol of the piteous Fairharbor life; as one puts an eagle, an arrow, a shield, or whatever, upon the seal of a commonwealth or upon a coin, so Fairharbor might take Henry; so she gave up her vigorous young life that "went

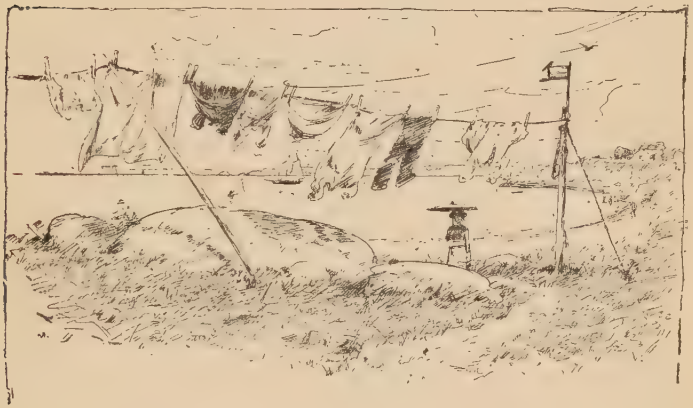
down to the sea in ships;" and so, ghosts before their time, her doomed men trod her shores.

"I believe I must stop and see Ellen Salt about some laces," said Miss Ritter, uncertainly, to the lady boarder, — with daisies and a mandarin parasol, now pulpy with the fog, and offering acute temptation to stick one's fingers between the ribs, — the lady who joined her on the beach. It did not matter about the laces, but it mattered to have

to talk to that stack of daisies just then. The lady's leather belt was tight, and the flowers seemed to gasp as if they had got into corsets.

This was the lady who always complained of the breakfasts, and knew how often every gentleman in the hotel came to see his wife. She was an idle, pretty, silly thing; abnormally, one might say inhumanly, luxurious. She wore thirty thousand

dollars' worth of diamonds, because it was understood she was afraid to leave them in the hotel rooms. She gave three dollars to the subscription for the Fairharbor widows of two hundred men drowned last year: she had acquired a theory that one must not make paupers.



As Helen Ritter struck off alone through the fog, down the lane, behind the wild-rose thicket, under the willow-trees, and against the big bowlders, to Mrs. Salt's little, old, unpainted cottage — picturesquely gray, and proportionally damp — she was thinking neither of the daisy and diamond boarder nor of two hundred drowned fish-

ermen, nor even of Ellen Jane and the weekly wash.

So far as her thoughts had organization rather than pulp, and might have been nautically termed more conscious than jelly-fish, she was thinking — still in that same amusing, outside, artistic sense — of herself; looking on, as she looked on at the summer people and the fishermen, with an unimpassioned, critical eye.

Too well we all know those mad or inspired moments (generally ours on dull afternoons) when we seem to catch up the whole of life at a handful, and fling it from us utterly in a kind of scorn that may be wholly noble or trivial, according to the impulse of the motion or the direction of the aim.

She, Helen Ritter, of Beacon Street, Boston, twenty-eight years old, an orphan, a Brahman (rich, if one stopped to think of that), and a beauty, member of Trinity Church and the Brain Club, subscriber to the Provident Association, and stockholder in the Athenæum, fond of her maid, her relatives, her bric-a-brac, and her way, walking to her washer-woman's through the fog, and suffering one of these supreme moments, could have flung her whole personality into Nirvana or the ocean by

"ELLEN JANE AND THE WEEKLY WASH." See page 16.

one sweep of her white-clad arm that day, and felt well rid of it. To be sure, nothing had happened.

That, perhaps, was the trouble?

"I am a type," said the young woman aloud. "I am nothing but a type; I have no 'use nor name nor fame' under the skies, beyond standing for the representative, like people that make the groups in tourists' photographs. I may thank Heaven if I don't do it inartistically, I suppose; and meanwhile pay my laundress. I wonder why I keep on coming to Fairharbor?"

Why, indeed? Helen Ritter to Helen Ritter, in the scorn of her heart and the depth of it, would give no answer to that question, but hit it with her fine, cool look as she would any other social intruder, and pass it by upon the other side. She was young for life to have come to what she called its end.

"Yet the light of a whole life dies,
When love is done,"

sang the musical boarder in the hotel parlor beyond the rose thicket. The east wind bore the sound over the bowlders, through the willow boughs, driving with the fog, as if both had been ghosts from the hidden sea.

HY cling to the old spot where the light of life had once been kindled and quenched? Why dog, like a spirit unreleased, the haunts of that blessed and accursed vitality? No, no. She could not curse it: no. Whom or what had she to curse? Fate, perhaps, or accident, or a man's terrible dullness of intellect before the nature of the woman he loves, or her own doom, or her own "way"—that unlucky way which as often wrought her mischief from being misunderstood as from being to blame, but which was none the less likely to be to blame for that.

"The mind has a thousand eyes,"

sang the summer boarder with laboriously accelerated emphasis, for the gentlemen had come in from the beach, and were listening,

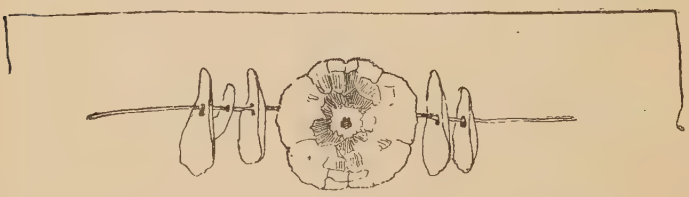
"The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one,
Yet the light of a whole life dies,
When love is done."

"Well, there!" said Ellen Jane Salt, "do come in out of this thick weather. Fog 's good for your

flannel dress; bleach it out; but my! ain't you sloppy? You got drabbled on the beach. Just you step up agen my tubs and let me wash out that hem o' your'n jest as you be. I'll stand you up to the stove after, and dry you up a mite, too, and iron you off, and you'll be slick as ever. Pity! I did you up only last Saturday, you know — There! I'm drove to death, but I can't stand seein' good washin' spoiled like that — and you, too, punctual as you are with the price — so many dozen, and so late in the season besides. No; the laces was n't extry, thank you. I'd be ashamed if I could n't do a bit of valingcens for *you*. But there! I was up till two o'clock this mornin' ironin' Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone's fluted nigh'-gownds (thread lace, every scrap). She had six. I'm drove out of my wits, and Rafè had to have one of his spells at three, poor little fellow! just as I'd got a snooze in my close atop of the bed-spread, for it was so hot with the heavy ironin' fire, and us so near the cook-stove. There!"

Ellen Jane Salt was a little woman, thin and keen of outline; the kind of woman sure to marry a large man, and rule him roundly. She had very bright blue eyes, sunken with want of sleep; and

the chiseling of care about her temples and her mouth told that her first youth had passed in hand-to-hand struggles with life, from which middle age gave no prospect of releasing her. The line between her lips indicated that nature had given her a sweet temper, which experience might push hard now and then under stress of circumstances. She had what it would be sufficient to call a busy voice, pitched like the American feminine voice of her class, but without a shrewish note; on the whole, making allowance for the national key, what might be called a motherly or wifely voice. She had the curious, watching look common to the women of Fairharbor, acquired from that observation of the sea with which the summer boarder is unfamiliar. A little anxious running down to the beach now,

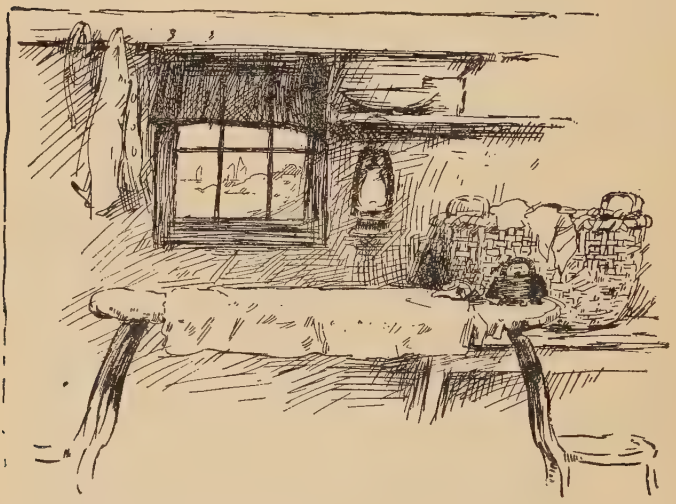


or the wharf then, when the fog sets in; a little more restless climbing of the cliff when the wind rises; this peering for the dory before dawn, or

searching for the sail at dusk, or scanning the headland by moonlight, or asking the dead of night to give the absent head-light to straining eyes, or beating about over the downs in the November gales with the glass which trembles in the aching arm before the blank horizon — these things, we see, give optical results which no social oculist has distinctly classified. For the rest, Ellen Jane Salt wore a navy blue calico dress, well fitted (by herself) to a pleasant figure, and tucked up over the hips under a gray crash washing apron, on which she wiped her steamed and dripping hands to give Miss Ritter greeting. There was a strip of tourist's ruffling in the neck of the navy blue calico, and the house, like the mistress, was as neat as a honey-comb. One might almost say, without straining a point, that there was a certain poetry in her avocation; for Ellen Jane Salt's old cottage seemed to the chance visitor a kind of temple of cleanliness. The small kitchen was sunny and sweet; and despite the disproportion of the ironing-table and stove to the environment, the only litter seemed to be the signs of the presence of children, which abounded. Then it must be distinctly understood that Mrs. Salt had a "parlor." What New-Englander has not?

Whether his debts be paid or his soul saved we need not stop to inquire; he will attend to that presently; meanwhile, a parlor or your life!

In Mrs. Salt's parlor was a carpet of a high-art pattern under reduced conditions — olive green, to



be sure, playing at geometry with Indian red, and sepia brown and black; it was an excellent carpet, and protected by a strip of oil-cloth nailed across like a little plank walk for the children to travel over to the bedroom beyond. There was a new paper on the walls of the parlor, very clean

and very gilt (olive green, of course), and the price per roll such a trifle that a cod-fish could afford it, as Mrs. Salt had often said; the paperer being Ellen Jane herself, at midnight, after a day's washing, when "he" was asleep.

In the parlor were a black hair-cloth sofa, a centre-table with a red cloth, a Bible, a copy of "The Youth's Companion," an old "Harper," and a patent-medicine almanac; a chromo called "Innocence Asleep" (presented with a pound of green tea, and since framed in gilt), and a framed photograph of Rafè; but when we come to Rafè —

Meanwhile, in the parlor there was also "an instrument." Mrs. Salt had privately meant it to be a piano; but Mr. Salt had a bad year haddocking, and that overgrown ambition was silently set aside. At any rate, it was an instrument. It did not matter whether one called it a melodeon or a cabinet organ, or whatever; the musical future of the Salt family was thus assured. In a narrower personal sense the instrument was intended for Emma Eliza, who took music lessons in prosperous seasons, and played — to Rafè. Emma Eliza was the oldest daughter, and Rafè was the youngest son. Mrs. Salt had six children — two babies. Rafè was a cripple.

"Was n't that Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone comin' up the beach alongside of you?" began Mrs. Salt promptly. She ironed as she talked, making small ceremony of Miss Ritter, who was an old customer, and regarded quite as one of the family. Mrs. Salt's irons thumped when she was tired or excited, though she would have you understand she knew how to iron scientifically and silently, and no fuss about it. To-night she thumped a good deal.

"She 's a good customer, Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone. But there! When I count the yards and yards on her petticoats — dollar a yard, every mite of it — and her nigh'-gownds *solid* [thump] valingeens, you might say, and them di'mon's [thump], and beef-tea for Rafè goes so fast at twenty-five cents a pound durin' his spells; and there! [thump]. Why, Miss Ritter, I did up one dress for that woman last week would ha' paid our rent for a whole year, by the Sassinfras Bitters Almanac; and Biram so sharp on his rent, too, luck or none; an' if a man makes eighty dollars to his trip or eight cents, it 's all the same to Biram come rent-day. But there! that 's fishin'. I ain't complainin', and thanks to mercy I can stand at

the wash-tub day an' night for 'em long 's there 's anything to wash. Six weeks ain't much, now, is it? Pretty short season; and no more for a woman to do in Fairharbor rest of the year than there is for a clam. We 're like 'em, I guess — just stick in the sand and stay there. But there!

I ain't complainin' either; and six children do want a sight of things from Janooary to Janooary, as you 'd know, if you 'd ever had one; and Rafè" —

"Rafè looks pale, I thought," interposed Miss Ritter, glancing into the "parlor," where a little, bent figure sat in a high, padded chair by the window.

The child had a delicate face, refined by suffer-

ing, and a singularly sweet mouth; he had long blonde hair, which fell over his face as he stooped. There were no other children visible, except the baby, asleep in the crib or cradle at the little cripple's feet. Now and then the boy jogged the cradle with his foot, as he bent over his work or play.

"It 's your scrap-book," said Mrs. Salt, in a low voice — "that one you gave him with the chromos and magazines when you come in June. You never see such a sight of comfort as that child gets out o' them things — bless your soul for it! It 's the *prettiness* that pleases him. The boarders give him money sometimes, but he don't pay the same attention to it — it ain't that, you know. There 's a kind of *prettiness* about Rafè — like the ladies and gentlemen I do for. He ain't like a fisherman, Rafè ain't, and so sweet of his temper in all his spells. Now last night never a word. His father and me hate to see Rafè suffer."

"I saw Henry on the beach just now," observed Miss Ritter, backing up by the stove, as she was bidden, to dry her white flannel dress hem after Mrs. Salt's professional treatment thereof. The young lady had quite dignity enough even for

"NOW AND THEN THE BOY JOGGED THE CRADLE WITH HIS FOOT." See page 28.

this awkward and exceedingly warm position, and seemed to fill the little house with a kind of splendor — distant, uncomprehending, accidental — like that gift of the scrap-book. She thought too little about them to know when she did the right thing by poor people, until they told her. She did not mistake her taste for her principles, though they

sometimes might. "I saw Henry," said Miss Ritter, in her affable tone, that the washer-woman did not always distinguish from personal friendship. "He was going off in the dory after those Benzine children that always get lost foggy days. I thought he was pretty patient, though he had to have his say about it. All the children were with him, I believe — Tom and Sue and the bigger baby and the rest."

"There ain't any rest except Emma Eliza," corrected the mother. "Six is enough, gracious knows

— and she 's gone home with Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone's wash, what there is ready of it. Yes, there 's that about Henry Salt, I will say; he 'll *do* anything, but he 's got to have his say. Him and me we have words sometimes. I 'm always sorry for it afterward. I never mean to. He says he don't mean to either. But there! men-folks is men-folks, not to say anything of women. Nigh as I can make out, the Lord *made* men-folks to be contrary; but sakes! if you love 'em, what 's the odds? You 've only got a bigger chance to do for 'em, and mother 'em up. They 're a kind of boys, men are, and have to be mothered up somehow by their women. They need pettin' and fussin' and strokin' the right way, and hear jest how they feel when they 're a mite sick, and fuss over 'em as if you s'posed they was dangerous, and not to say nothin' when you 're ten times worse yourself — that 's men. I don't say I don't have my tempers out myself — like an influenzy, got to come — *sometimes*. But there! I 've got a good husband, dear. Nor there ain't a stiddier, nor soberer, nor better, goes to the Banks from Fairharbor year in, year out. I 'm very fond of Henry. We 've had a happy life, me and Henry."

"A happy life?"

Miss Ritter looked about the fisherman's cottage; at the small rooms crowded with the signs of surplus life and harassing economies; at the sober, sleeping baby, who seemed to have been born in a hard season, and bore the inheritance of poverty and anxiety in the lines of his unconscious face; at the crippled boy stooping in the window against the dull square of light made by the conflict of the fog and dusk beyond; at the nervous motions of the tired woman at the ironing-table. Ellen Jane Salt did not pass for a heroine, but she had aches enough and ailments enough to have put Miss Ritter or Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone under treatment from a fashionable physician for the rest of her life. Any lady who felt as she did would have gone to bed. The fisherman's wife washed and ironed; thus Rafè had beef-tea — and the instrument. Somehow even the instrument did not make the fisherman's cottage seem an abode of luxury. "I can always sell it," Mrs. Salt said, when approached by good sociologists on the subject of this extravagance. "It 's good property; it keeps the children to home evenings; and Rafè — why, I got it for *Rafè*."

The washer-woman stood straight at her ironing-table, and lifted her head as she followed Helen Ritter's look about the cottage, on whose sparse comforts the advancing dusk was setting heavily.

"Yes," she said, very gently, "Henry and me have had a happy life — him a fisherman, me a washer-woman — six children — and Rafè — and poor. Well, there! there 's been times poor don't *say* it — and hard. It 's been pretty hard. But you see, my dear, me and Henry *like* each other. I suppose that makes a difference."

"It must make a difference," repeated Miss Ritter, drearily. She went abruptly into the darkening parlor, kissed the crippled child upon the forehead, said some little pleasant thing to him, and came restlessly back. Rafè climbed down from his high chair laboriously, took up his crutch, and followed her. His mother was lighting the kerosene lamp, and the poor place leaped suddenly into color. Rafè pulled at the navy blue calico dress. The washer-woman snatched off her wet crash apron, and drew the little fellow — alas! never perhaps to be too big a fellow for his mother's lap — into her arms. The ironing-table and the clothes-basket and a wash-tub of rinsing clothes closed into

the perspective of this plain picture; and Rafè's crutch, where it had fallen in the foreground, reminded Miss Ritter somehow of the staff in the little St. John scenes that we all know.

"The Madonna — of the Tubs," she murmured.

"What, ma'am?" asked Rafè.

"There! there!" said the Madonna; "go and

watch for father, Rafè." She handed him his crutch with her kiss — a half-savage kiss, like that of some wild, thwarted maternal thing — and the child limped eagerly away.

"He must have found them Benzine children by this time," Mrs. Salt ran on, taking to her irons again nervously. "But, fact is, I'm *never* easy in my mind when Henry 's in thick weather, not even off-shore. It 's hard being a woman in Fairharbor. Our minister said, says he, when he first come to town he noticed all the women-folks called it 'the dreadful sea.' I guess, come to think of it, we do — jest as you 'd say 'Monday mornin'' or 'cold weather,' and never take notice of your words. You see, I'm kind o' down to-night, tell the truth, Miss Ritter. — Yes, Rafè, watch for papa, dear. He 'll be disappointed if he does n't see Rafè first. — I would n't tell the child just yet. You see, his father 's got to go to the Banks. Rafè hates to have his father go to the Banks. He worries. We thought we 'd get along — for me and Rafè do worry so — but Henry 's had an awful poor season off-shore. He thinks he 's got to go. He ain't made but twenty-two dollars and sixty-three cents this summer. It 's safer off-shore, take it all, though

it 's bad enough, Miss Ritter, fix it as you will. It was off-shore his boat keeled over, eight years ago the 23d of September, not more 'n two miles off the light — him and Job Ely and Peter Salt and William X. Salt went down in a squall, and I 'd been nervous all day; so when it struck I got the glass, and took Emma Eliza — for she was little then, but my oldest born, and all I had to speak to that would understand — and me and Emma Eliza we walked over the downs, and over the downs, blowed about agen the wind, with the glass, and stood watchin'; and, my gracious God, Miss Ritter, I saw that there boat go down before my living eyes!"

IT was an old story, told to how many neighbors and "summer people" how many times! but at this point the fisherman's wife gasped and blanched. She had never been able to finish it; each time she thought she should. She took up her flat-irons hastily, for scalding tears were dropping on Mrs. Hannibal P. Harrowstone's fluted skirt.

"He h'isted on to the keel, her bottom upmost,"

she said, in a lower voice, "and they all h'isted on and held, and a lumber schooner from Maine come along full canvas, but it took an eternal punishment, lookin' through the glass, to get her swung to and dory off. But they was saved — him and Job Ely and Peter Salt and William X. Salt — and him; but they looked like flies before my eyes, for the sea broke over 'em, and they kep' a-slippin', and so me and Emma Eliza put down the glass and come home and set down; and Emma Eliza made me a cup of tea — for I was that gone, and her so little to do for me. And there we set, for we could n't do nothin' till he come home at five minutes past nine o'clock, bustin' open the door — so! — drippin' wet, and pale as his own corpse, and I says, 'Henry! Henry!' and he says, 'Nelly Jane!' and we says no more, for someways we could n't do it. But Emma Eliza cried — for she used to bellow, that child did, when she was little — enough to wake last year's mackerel catch, and then she made her father's tea, for I was that gone; and you see, Miss Ritter, it was next month Rafè was born, and he was born, my dear — as he is."

"Marm, I don't *see* my fa—ther," interrupted Rafè, in his gentle, drawling voice, from the open front door.

"FOR THE SEA BROKE OVER 'EM." See page 38.

"And so, as I says," proceeded Mrs. Salt, more briskly, "fishin' is fishin', off-shore or no. But I have n't *no* confidence in the Grand Banks. I wish my husband had n't got to go this fall. I ain't any time to be nervous, but there 's always time to see things. You know, you *see* him so, before your eyes, all sorts of ways, when he 's that far from you — fogs, or a gale, or a squall — drownin' mostly, and callin' after you, if you 're his wife and have always done for him. Even a headache he 'd run to you about. And to stand here ironin', a thousand miles away, and him maybe" —

"Marm," called Rafè, "I see my fa—ther! I see my fa—ther!"

"Well, there!" cried Ellen Jane Salt, putting down her irons tremendously. She blushed like a girl, and bustled about, "picking up" here and there, and hurrying to fry the cod for supper. She almost forgot her young lady customer, who was glad just then to slip away.

On the way down the lane she met the fisherman and his children hurrying home; but in the dusk they passed with a pleasant, neighborly nod. Miss Ritter was sad, and Henry Salt was hungry; so she with her kindly "Well, Henry!" and he with his

civil "H 'ar' yer, Miss Ritter?" went their ways. It so happened from one trifling cause and another — she was called to Boston earlier than usual, and what not — that this was the last time she spoke to the good fellow that season, as she afterward remembered.

She turned in the dark lane, and watched the group scrambling home in their happy-go-lucky fashion — Henry rode the bigger baby (he was known in the Salt family as "the other baby") pickback all the way; Sue and Tommy trudged and toddled, snatching at his oil-clothes, which were wet, and slipped from their little round red hands.

Henry Salt sang, as he carried "the other baby," a snatch of a sailor's song Miss Ritter had never heard before —

> "Give the wind time
> To blow the man down."

Past the rose thicket, by the great bowlder, dim in the dark and the now drenching fog, man and children, pushing merrily home, made one confused group, like a centaur or a torso to the watcher's eye.

The cottage door was wide open. What a splen-

"SHE MET THE FISHERMAN AND HIS CHILDREN." See page 41.

dor of light leaped out! Was it only that kerosene lamp upon the ironing-table? How it beat back the crawling fog, which made as if it would enter first and was denied.

"Give the wind time,"

rang the fisherman's happy bass.

From outside, through the door one could see clearly and far. All the little house seemed to lean out to draw them in; the sweet, tidy, homely things grew gilded and glorious, and had a look as if they stirred; even the instrument could be seen deep in the parlor, with the reduced high-art paper. In the doorway, once again, the Madonna of the Tubs had found that fine, unconscious attitude — half stooping to take Rafè, who had stood too long upon his little crutch. He put up his hand and stroked her cheek.

"Oh, marm, I've *got* my fa—ther!"

"Give the wind time
To blow the man down,"

sang Henry Salt. Laughing, he snatched and

kissed the child — the mother too, perhaps. Down there in the dark wet lane Miss Ritter could not see, or her eyes failed her somehow.

For a moment the group stood in the open door in a kind of glory. Then Emma Eliza came in, and putting down her empty clothes-basket, and going straight to the instrument, began — it seemed that Rafè asked — to play. A waltz, perhaps? A minstrel melody? Some polka learned of the music-teacher? A merry ditty flung at fate and dashed at life and death, between whose equal mysteries these poor souls wrenched their brave and scanty happiness? My musical friend — no. Emma Eliza sang a hymn. She sang that venerable Sunday-school jingle known as "Pull for the Shore."

Rafè joined in it sweetly, leaning on his crutch. His mother sang it shrilly while she fried the cod. Henry Salt sang it merrily while he hung his oil-clothes on the nail behind the door. Sue and Tommy and the other baby sang it anyhow; and the baby in the crib waked up and stretched his arms out to the instrument.

> "Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore!
> Heed not the rolling waves, but bend to the oar!
> Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore!"

Then the door shut suddenly; the Madonna was blotted from sight; blackness replaced the sweet

and homely halo; only the voices of the fisher-people, expressing what they knew of happiness in the sombre, sacred words that held the terror and the danger of the sea, echoed faintly down the dark and now deserted lane.

"If this were a story in need of a heroine," said Helen Ritter as she turned, "it is a vacant position which I should not be asked to fill. And yet I 'd *be* my washer-woman to be" —

> "Give the wind time
> To blow for the shore,"

rang out the gruff bass voice that wind and weather had roughened in shouting "Ship ahoy!" For

Henry had musically forgotten himself, as will be seen, and Emma Eliza, at the instrument, came to a severe halt to set him straight.

ERHAPS if it had not been for William X. Salt it would never have happened.

Tennyson, I think, or it might well be, has sketched a sea-port town in one line which runs: —

"And almost all the village had one name."

The fishing town of Fairharbor was generously furnished with the appropriate name of Salt. There were great Salts and small Salts, rich and poor Salts, drunk and sober Salts, Salts making money in the counting-rooms and Salts earning it upon the wharves, Salts in the fish firms and Salts before the mast — Abraham L. Salt, for instance, who owned the schooner (herself Abby E. Salt by name), and William X. Salt and Peter Salt and Henry Salt, who sailed in her to the Grand Banks, after the golden-rod and the summer people were gone, when

there were no Japanese umbrellas, and nobody screamed at the snails, when there was no washing by the dozen to be had, and only now and then a letter from Miss Ritter — in November, just before Thanksgiving, when the weather had turned cold and the wind blew from the north.

OTHING is easier than to find a reason for the unpleasant in ourselves in causes outside of ourselves, and yet, in spite of this calm, proverbial philosophy, it is probably true that if it had not been for William X. Salt it would never have happened. At least Ellen Jane said so, and will say so to her dying day. For from whatever cause — divine, diabolic, or human — whether because William X. Salt treated Henry, or because Henry allowed William X. to treat him, or because Heaven permitted or hell decreed — the truth remains that Henry and Ellen Jane Salt, like many another wedded pair loving less than they, like many another loving even more than they, quarrelled; but the worst of it was that they quarrelled the night that Henry set sail in the Abby E. Salt, with William X. and Peter and Job Ely and the other fellows — ten in all — for the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

William X. Salt had given him the whiskey, for, as I say, it was turning cold, and the wind blew bitterly from the north, and the men had worked till they were fretted and chilled, getting their traps

and trawls aboard. Now Henry was a sober man, for the most part, and meant to keep so; or his wife meant to keep him so, which is much the same thing; and I should libel him were I to say that he came home to supper drunk. He was not drunk. Strictly speaking, he was not sober. In point of fact, he was what may be charitably called sensitive

to liquor, owing to some passing familiarity of the nervous system with its effects in early youth; and it took little enough to make it clear that he had better have taken none at all. As a rule, Henry recognized this physiological fact. That November night he was cold and tired and "down," and William X., who was sober sometimes, but so seldom that, by the law of chances, that could hardly have been one of the times, was moved to treat at the wrong moment or in the wrong way; and if Henry had taken a little less — or even a little more, and

come home to his wife drunk, it might not have happened, we must admit, for he was jolly and silly when he was drunk; but he got only so far as the cross stage, and cross he was — it need not be denied — to Ellen Jane.

What was it all about? What is it ever all about when two who love each other dearer than any great thing on earth, fall sharp asunder because of some little one — too little to find? The pity of love is that it is given to small creatures: let us not forget that itself is great.

Perhaps it was the door that slammed; perhaps it was the coffee that did not settle; it may be that the baby cried, or the chowder burned their tongues, or somebody upset the milk pitcher, or the lamp smoked, or the ironing fire was burning coal too fast, or the barberry sauce (brought out to honor the occasion) had not enough molasses in it, or the griddle-cakes did not come fast enough, or there was a draught somewhere — who could say? Neither of these married lovers, perhaps, after it was all over. Less than any one of these almost invisible causes has broken hearts and homes before, and will, world without end, till lovers learn the infinite preciousness of love, and human speech is guarded like human chastity.

N short, then and there, on the night, on the hour of their separation, Henry and Ellen Jane Salt "came to words."

She had been crying all day, poor woman, because he had to go. She dreaded a November voyage intelligently and insanely. Rafè had cried too, but he hid in the parlor to do it. The children were all sober except the baby and the other baby. The house was illuminated — there were two kerosene lamps and the lantern. All Henry's mending was tearfully and exquisitely done. There had been fresh doughnuts fried, and a squash pie (extravagantly) made to please him. Emma Eliza, at the instrument, played the "Sweet By-and-by." Her mother was dressed in her best calico — a new one never at the wash-tub, one of those chocolate patterns with strong-minded flowers that women fancy, Heaven and the designers know why. Her hair was brushed and her collar fresh, and she had looked as pretty as a pink, poor thing, dashing away the tears when he came in; ready for all the little feminine arts that make men cheerful at the cost of women's nerve and courage.

Then it happened — whatever it was — and the glow went out of her face as the gloom gathered on his, and that sweet look about her mouth settled

away, and the smouldering fire burned up slowly from a great depth in her sunken, tired blue eyes; and with a breaking heart she blamed him; and with a barbarous tongue he admired her; and their words ran as high as their nerves were strained;

and because they loved each other dearly every harsh word they said scorched them like coals of white fire, on which one pours more to cover up the blaze; and because they were man and wife, and more to each other than all the world besides, they said each to each, bitterly dashing out blind words, what neither would have said to friend or neighbor for very shame's sake; and so it came about that on this night they were in high temper, than which none had been really sharper, perhaps, in all their wedded lives.

"There is something always wrong about this house, curse it!" cried the man whom William X. Salt had treated.

"There 's nothing wrong in this house but him that 's setting sail from it," cried the woman whom the man had scolded.

They were flashing words — up and out and over — and, had it fared differently with them, at another time a sob and a kiss would have met above the ashes of the sorry scene, and there would have been an end, and peace to it.

But the Abby E. Salt weighed anchor at eight o'clock. It was quarter past seven when Henry pushed back from the half-eaten supper and took

up his old hat to go. He had over a mile to walk, and a ferry to catch, and what not to do; he was already late. There was no time to let the sweet waters of repentance come to the flood. He bade the children good-by sullenly, kissed Rafè, and, after an instant's hesitation, pushed open the door. He said he must hunt up Job Ely, and so saying, and saying no more than this, he went out of the house. He did not look at his wife.

Her pretty, weary face had flushed a dangerous scarlet during the scene which had passed. Now it turned a dreadful white. She stood quite still. She seemed to have no more moral power to move after the man than an unsought girl or a woman repulsed. Her whole feminine nature was quivering pitifully. When a man is rough with a woman he forgets that he hurts two creatures — the human and the woman — and that he hurts the second more than it can hurt himself by just so much as the essence of the feminine nature is a fact superimposed upon the human. But as the mystery of this knowledge is one that princes and philosophers have not yet commanded, who should expect it of the fisherman Henry Salt?

The children during this unhappy scene had

stood silent. To their father's quickness of temper they were used; he scolded one minute and kissed the next; but the usual had become the unexpected, and a kind of moral embarrassment filled the cottage. The baby and the other baby began to cry; Emma Eliza, whether from some rudimentary idea of calling her father's attention, or from some daughterly delicacy which led her to get herself out of the way, sat down at the instrument and vigorously played "Pull for the Shore" on the wrong key; Rafè got upon his crutch and hobbled to the door; the wife alone stood quite still.

The wind was rising fiercely from the north, as has been said, and bursting in at the open door, caught it and clutched it to and fro, closing but not latching, and noisily playing with it, as if with a shaken mood that could not fix itself. For the instant, the master of the house seemed to be shut out, and seemed possibly to one outside to have been *slammed* out by hands within.

"Let me by, Rafè; let me by this minute!" The wife made one bound, and down the wooden steps, where she stood bewildered. No one was to be seen. It was deadly dark, and the wind raved with a volume of sound which seemed to the Fairharbor

"A LITTLE FIGURE HIT HER, HURRYING BY UPON A LITTLE CRUTCH."

See page 61

woman, born and nourished of the blast, to be something intelligent and infernal pitted against her. She flung her shrill voice out into it: "Henry! Henry! come back and say good-by to me. I'm sorry. Henry! Henry! *Henry!* I'm *sorry!* I'm *sorry!*"

But only the awful throat of the gale made answer. She ran a little way, straining her ears, her eyes, her voice, beating her breast in a kind of frenzy, calling passionately, plaintively, then passionately again; and so, despairing, for she made no headway against the roar of the November nor'-wester, staggered, turned, and stopped.

At this moment, scrambling through the dark, a little figure hit her, hurrying by upon a little crutch.

"I'm goin' to catch my fa—ther," said Rafè.

He pushed on beyond her, his bright hair blown straight like a helmet or visor of gold from his forehead, calling as he went, slipping, daring, tumbling on the sharp rocks, and up again. Down there in the dark, midway of the road she saw a little fellow stop to gather strength and throw the whole force of his sweet young voice like a challenge to the gale: —

"Fa—ther! marm 's sorry! (Don't you cry,

marm. I *think* he'll answer.) Fa—ther! fa—ther! marm says she 's sorry! Marm is sorry, fa—ther! (Just keep still, marm. I 'm *sure* he 'll answer.) Fa—THER! MARM IS SORRY!"

The crippled child hurled the whole of his little soul and body into that last cry, and then she saw him turn and limp, more slowly, back. He came up to her gently where she stood sobbing in the dark and wind; and as if he had been the parent, one might say, and she the child, he patted her upon the hand.

"I told you I 'd catch him, marm—*dear* marm," added Rafè.

She shook her head incredulously, convulsive with her tears, turning drearily to go back. She hardly noticed Rafè in that minute. The wife was older than the mother in her; if stronger, who should say her nay?

"But I caught my fa—ther," persisted Rafè. "He says, says he"—

"Rafè, he could n't, dear."

"Marm, he hollered, 'So be I.'"

"Did your father say that, honest, Rafè?"

She lifted her head piteously, pleadingly, before the child.

"I *think* he did," said Rafè, conscientiously. "I says, 'Fa—ther, marm 's sorry'; and he says, 'So be I.'"

"If he says, 'So be I,' God bless you, Rafè! mother's sonny boy."

But with that she began to sob afresh, half with hope and half with misery. The child, whose sympathies were made old and fine by suffering, watched her soberly.

"I think he did," said Rafè, stoutly. "*I think* my fa—ther hollered, 'So be I.'"

He lifted the truthful face of an angel in a halo to the poor Madonna in the glimmer of the open door. His yellow hair shone like an aureole about his ardent little face. He would have given his scrap-book just then to say, "I know he did." But Rafè never lied. The other children supposed it was because he was a cripple.

T was in just eleven days that they brought her the news. Abraham L. Salt asked Biram to tell her, and Biram sent a woman neighbor. The northwester had blown grandly, as any one might know, straight for the Banks, and blown the Abby E. Salt thither in a smart voyage of four days and a half. After the steady blow the weather thickened, and that which has happened to Fairharbor fishermen, and will happen again, God help them! till the way of the wind and wave is tamed to human anguish, happened then and there to Henry Salt. The Zephaniah Salt, a fine three-masted schooner, about returning from the fishing-grounds, carried the word to the telegraph at Boston, and the telegraph to Abraham L. Salt, as was said; he to Biram, Biram to the woman neighbor, the woman, praying God's pity, to her.

She did not say it as she meant to. Who of us does hard things as we thought we should? She walked straight into the cottage, and stood still in the middle of the floor, and began to cry. The first

she knew she had caught the little crippled child and put him into his mother's arms, and said, —

"Rafè, tell your poor marm that your father 's drownded — for I can't."

"At the Grand Banks, on the morning of November —, Henry Salt and Job Ely, of Fairharbor, dory mates, set out from the schooner Abby E. Salt to look after their trawls, and were lost in the fog. Every effort was made in vain to find the unfortunate men. No hope is any longer felt of their safety. The bodies have not been recovered. Salt leaves a wife and six children. Ely was unmarried. The Abby E. Salt belongs to the well-known firm of Abraham L. Salt & Co., of Fairharbor."

ISS RITTER, idly nibbling at her "Daily Advertiser" before her open cannel fire one bleak December morning, chanced upon the paragraph, which she re-read and pondered long. Ellen Jane had sent no word out of her misery, poor thing! A letter achieved is an affliction to the unlearned, and she had enough to bear without adding that.

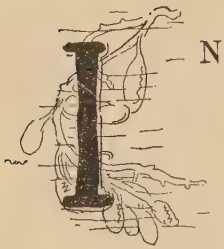
"I'd rather do a day's washing any time than write a letter," she used to say. Besides, after all, what would the "boarder lady" care? When it came to the point of bereavement, remorse, widow-

hood, hunger, cold, and despair, the summer patron seemed as far from the Fairharbor winter as her paper parasol or her "valingcens." Henry Salt had gone the way of his calling, like other men; he had become one of the one or two hundred

Fairharbor fishermen over whose fate a comfortable dry-shod world heaves a sigh once a year when the winter gales blow so hard as to shake the posts of the firm, warm house a little, or even to puff the lace above the sleeping baby's crib in the curtained, fire-lit room. His wife, like other women, was a "Fairharbor widow," and like other women must bend her to her fate.

She bowed to it in those first weeks in a stupefaction that resembled moral catalepsy. A reserve such as restrains the hand that writes this page — a page like a bridge over a chasm down which one cannot look, yet over which one must cross perforce — solemnly enwrapped the fisherman's widow in that space between the night when the woman neighbor put the crippled child into his mother's arms, and the advance of the holidays, which come — God help us! — straight into the ruined as once into the blessed homes.

And so to Fairharbor as to Beacon Street, to Ellen Salt as to Helen Ritter, or you or me, the sacred time which enhances all happiness and all anguish came gently or cruelly, but surely, on; and it was the day before Christmas, and going to snow.



N the sad cottage behind the leafless rose thicket and under the ice-clad bowlders they were all at home early that afternoon: the mother from her dreary attempt and failure to find another neighbor to "wash" on Monday morning; Emma Eliza from the net factory, where she wove seines and hammocks (when the factory was running) at irregular wages, ranging from four dollars a week to none; Tommy and Sue from the district school, where one must have "an education," even if no father and no dinner. Rafè took care of the baby and the other baby, and was, so to speak, professionally at home. Besides, Rafè himself (indeed, I might say Rafè in particular) was about to become the support of the family. As luck would have it — or as God willed it — a group of marine artists had discovered Fairharbor that year, and were wintering, by the mercies of Providence and the landlady, in the closed hotel, hard at work; among them one, a portrait and *genre* painter, guest of the little company for a week or so, had seen Rafè at a window one day, and, presto! the child's

face — a cherub strayed from Paradise into misfortune, the fellows said — shall go to the exhibition.

Rafè was earning what occurred to him as an enormous salary as a model by the hour; he failed to see why Sue had no rubbers or Tommy no coat, or why the kitchen fire burned so cold, or there was no meat for dinner, in view of his monetary receipts. He had often told his mother that he would support her, and begged her not to cry. It did not strike him that he had never seen her cry since his father died.

As Christmas Eve drew on, they were all well in the house. Emma Eliza drew the curtains fast, for the hard and bitter air must melt into snow from very force of resistance to its fate, now any moment, and the house was cold. Rafè asked her to leave one of the kitchen curtains up a little; he had a fancy for looking out on dark nights; he used to stand so, sometimes crooning and singing to himself, his bright hair pressed against the window-pane, and his thin hands up against his temples. Before his father died, Rafè sang "Pull for the Shore" a great deal, standing by that window looking out; sometimes Emma Eliza would catch it up upon the instrument and join. But he did not sing it any more.

The outside door did not latch — the one that slammed poor Henry out on that last night; it never latched very well; there was no man to fix it now; a carpenter could not be afforded; the women and children had tinkered away at the fastening, in their blundering fashion, with blinding tears. Such are the cruel small ways in which the poor are reminded of their bereavements at every crevice of their lives. Rafè had pushed up the wash-bench finally against the door to keep it in its place.

Mrs. Salt looked about the little group, trying duteously to smile. She had on a (dyed) black dress; she looked sixty years old; she was what one might be tempted to call almost infernally changed; an indescribable expression had got hold of her face; she seemed like a dead person up and dressed. There was something no less than dreadful in the mechanical gentleness and reserve which had settled down upon this emotional, voluble creature. No accident betrayed her into any acceleration of the voice; the crossest baby never raised a ruffle in her accent; she had such a monotonous sweetness and bruised patience as seemed like a paralysis of common human nature. Her children

could not remember to have had even a rebuke from her since that night when the woman neighbor came in. They had deserved it twenty times.

"Children," she said, dully and gently, "I have n't any presents for you this Christmas. It 's the first one, I guess. I can't help it, you know, my dears. We are very poor to-night. But I 'll build you a big, *hot* fire — it 's all I can do. We 'll keep Christmas Eve by keeping warm, if we can. The stove don't work, somehow; the lining needs fixing; it needs a man." She hesitated, looking pitifully about the room, at each little sober face.

"Won't that do? Won't that be better than no Christmas at all? I thought mebbe it would. It 's all mother 's got for you. She could n't do any better. She wanted to. He always set so much by Christmas. He" —

The broken door blew in and slammed against the wash-bench loudly. Rafè went to shut it; but it resisted the little fellow's strength — fell inward heavily, and with it a huge object thrust itself, or was thrust, along the floor noisily enough.

"It 's the expressman!" cried Rafè. "It 's Tan and Salt's express cart, for *us*, marm!"

Now the Salt family had never had an express

package in all their lives. So intense was the excitement for the moment that it was almost impossible to remember that one's father was drowned. They gathered like bees about the box, which the driver lifted in for them compassionately; even stopping to help Emma Eliza start the cover.

"Seein' ye 're only women-folks — of a Christmas Eve. And never in my life did I see a woman could open a *wooden* box. Guess ye 'd have to set on it all night if I did n't — and no man else to do for ye" —

But Tan and Salt's express checked himself, and departed hastily from the loosened cover and unfinished sentence, letting in a whirl of the now falling snow as he closed the rattling door. He wished, with all his soul, he had time to fix that latch.

Now in that box — what mystery! what marvel! Emma Eliza thought it was like a "Seaside" novel. Rafè had read fairy tales, and he considered it probable that it was the work of what he called "a genii," that flannels and shoes, and a second-hand overcoat, and mittens, and a black blanket shawl, should land on the floor, with flour and coffee and crackers, and a package of tea and sugar, and rubbers for Sue, and a turkey for Christmas

dinner, and under all — stockings! There were six pairs of stockings — brown, red, blue, green, gray, and white, each one filled to the knee with Santa Claus knew what — trifles to the giver, ecstasy to the child — all the way down from Emma Eliza to the baby, and the other baby. Ah, well, such things do happen, thank the blessed Christmas spirit, in the homes of the brave and self-helping poor; they do not perhaps often happen so gracefully, we might say so artistically.

"So pretty," cried Rafè — "so *pretty* in her." For when the romance of the expressman was followed by the immensity of a smart Fairharbor hack rolling under the leafless willows to the very door, and Rafè, pulling back the wash-bench again, let in, with a shower of bright snow, Miss Helen Ritter, standing tall and splendid in her furs of silver-seal, it seemed quite what was to be expected; and not one of the poor souls knew, which was the best of it, that the young lady had never done such a thing before in all her life. She had done it now in her own "way" — that whimsical, obstinate, lavish way that sometimes was so wrong and sometimes so right, but this time so sweet and true. Was it her heart that told her how? For her head was pain-

fully uneducated in sociology. She had not a particle of training as a visitor to the poor. She had not a theory as to their elevation. She had never been interested in books concerning their management. She was simply acquainted with her washerwoman, and had approached her as she would any other acquaintance, according to the circumstances of the case. It was a brave, self-helpful family; she knew them; not a drop of pauper blood rolled in the veins of their sturdy bodies. Ghastly poverty had got them; worse was before them; but if any desolate woman and her babes, thrust into their fate, could breast it and not go under, these were they.

As a human being to human beings, Helen Ritter had come; she knew no more, nor thought beyond. She had felt moved to treat them as she would wish to be treated in their places, and she did as she was moved; that was all. If she made no blunder, it was certainly owing to the rightness of her instinct, not to the wisdom of her views.

But who stopped to think of views or instincts in the astounded cottage that Christmas Eve? Not Miss Ritter, stooping, flushed and brilliant, drawn down by children's fingers to her knees upon the kitchen floor among the Christmas litter. Not Rafè,

ON THE GRAND BANKS.

who put up his pale face and kissed her, saying not a word. Not Emma Eliza, who meant to ask her to play a Christmas carol on the instrument, thinking that would be polite. (The instrument, by the way, was drearily seeking a purchaser, poor thing.) Not Sue, nor Tommy, nor the baby, nor the other baby, pulling off the veil which had shielded the feathers of their visitor's dainty bonnet from the snow. Not Mrs. Salt, who came up to take her fur-lined cloak with a soft, "You 'll be too warm, my dear," and so showing all the stately, luxurious outlines of the finest figure she had ever "done up," in that sweet and humble attitude, kneeling on the kitchen floor. Not Mrs. Salt, stealing away by herself, silent, still, and changed, and strange — she had scarcely spoken. What ailed her? What would she? Where was she? Helen Ritter, unintroduced to mortal sorrow, hesitated before the bereavement of her washer-woman, but summoned heart at last, and followed, slipping from the children's arms.

Ellen Jane Salt was in her chilly parlor, crouched alone; she had got into a corner bent over something, and when Miss Ritter came up she was half shocked to see that it was the black blanket shawl.

"I did n't know what ever I was to do for mournin' for him!" The woman looked up, breaking out thus sharply. "You 've no idea how they talk about us Fairharbor widows, we so poor, they say, and takin' charity to spend it on our black — and reason, maybe; but ask 'em if it 's human natur to break your heart and mourn your dead in colors. Ask 'em if bein' poor puts out human natur. Miss Ritter, I had n't nothin' to mourn for Henry in but this one old dress I dyed before my money went to Biram for the rent, and my cloak was a tan-color season before last, and trimmed with bugle trimmin', and my shawl was a striped shawl, with red betwixt, you know. And us without our coal in, me going mournin' for my husband half black, half colors, like a widow that was half glad and half sorry — enough of 'em be — my dear, it *hurt* me. And to think you should think of that, and send me of a Christmas Eve — Oh, my dear, I have n't cried before, but it 's the *understandin'* me that breaks me up. Oh, don't notice me, don't mind me. I have n't cried since he was drowned; I have n't darst. Oh, don't you touch me — oh yes, you may. How soft your arms are! Oh, nobody has held me since he — Oh, my God! my God! my God! I 've *got* to cry."

"Come here," said Helen Ritter, sobbing too — "come here and let me hold you, and tell me all about it."

"How *can* I tell you?" moaned the woman. "Oh, it is such a dreadful thing to tell! Oh, my dear, it is n't his *dying;* it is n't that Henry is *dead.* If that was all, I 'd be a blessed woman — me a widow, and them fatherless, and so poor — I 'd be a blessed woman; and God be thanked to mercy this living night if it was only that my husband had *died!* Oh, how should you know? You never was married; you never had a husband; you never quarreled with the man you loved."

"Hush! hush! hush!" Involuntarily the lady thrust her hand upon the other woman's mouth; then drew it off and patted her silently, stroking her hair and shoulders with exquisite loving motions, as women do to women of their own sort when sorrow is upon them.

"We quarreled," cried Ellen Jane Salt, throwing out her arms, and letting them drop heavily at her side — "we quarreled, Miss Ritter, that very last night, that very last minute, him and me — us that loved each other, man and wife, for seventeen years, and him going to his death from out that

door. 'Oh,' he says, 'there 's always something wrong about this house!' and he cursed it; but he did n't mean it, poor fellow; he never meant it; for they must have treated him to the wharves to make him say a thing like that — you *know* they must; and I says, 'There 's nothing wrong in this house but him that 's setting sail from it.' My God! my God! my God! I says those words to him at the very last; and he" —

"Marm, I *told* him you was sorry." Rafè pulled her by the dyed black sleeve. The little fellow's face worked pathetically. He did not know before that he could not bear it to see his mother cry. "I think, I believe, I 'm pretty *sure*," said Rafè, "that my fa—ther told me, '*So be I.*'"

Helen Ritter drew the child into her free arm, and so held him, sick at heart, for in that supreme moment the widowed wife seemed to have gone deaf and blind; she did not notice even Rafè.

"What 's death," cried Ellen Jane, lifting her wan face to heaven, and sinking with a sickening, writhing motion to her knees, — "what 's death, if *that* was *all*, to man and wife that love each other? I 've been cold since Henry died, and I 've gone hungry — don't let on to the children, for they

don't know — and I 'd *be* cold and hungry ; and if I was to starve, what 's that? And if I mourned and cried for him, us partin' kind, why, what is that? It 's the words between us ! — oh, it 's the words between us ! I dream 'em in my dreams, I hear 'em in the wind, I hear 'em at the instrument when the children sing — it 's the words between us ! Him that courted me and wedded me, the baby's father — and we loved each other, and we come to words that last, last minute, him going to his death ! My God ! my God ! my God ! "

" Miss Ritter, dear, what am I sayin' ? Send the children off. Crying, Rafè? Don't, dear. There! mother's sonny boy ; come here. Don't, Rafè, don't. Yes, I 'll come and see the Christmas stockings. Let me be a minute. Go, Miss Ritter, with 'em, if you 'll be so good. Kiss me, Rafè. Mother 'll come presently, my son. Let me be a minute, won't you, by myself."

They went and left her, as they were bidden, every one. Somebody shut the door of the chilly parlor, not quite to, and so shielded her in for a little, yet did not shut her off alone ; they could not bear to.

Helen Ritter gathered the children about her,

among the presents and playthings, but it was hard. Christmas had gone out of the fatherless house. It was not easy for sorrow to play at Christmas Eve. Rafè tried to entertain the lady. He told her he was going to support the family. He told her how he sat as model to the gentleman who painted up at the hotel, and Miss Ritter asked about the pic tures, and a little about the painter, but not so much, and so they chatted quietly.

"Ready, mother?" called Rafè, at the half-shut door.

"Presently, my son."

"Coming, mother?" begged Emma Eliza.

"Tumin', mummer?" called the other baby.

"In a minute, yes, my dears."

"Mother, Miss Ritter says she 's found somebody to buy the instrument. Mother, Miss Ritter says *she* wants an instrument. She says she 'll give a hundred and twenty-five dollars for it. She says she wants an instrument very much. Coming, mother?"

"Yes, my child."

Just as she came out among them, quiet again, and gentle with her strange, dull gentleness, and stood so, a little apart from them, looking on, Rafè

got up and went to his window, where the curtain hung half drawn (half-mast, they called it), and looked out. It was snowing fiercely. The lights of the near hotel showed through the white drift. Emma Eliza would walk over with Miss Ritter when she had to go. Miss Ritter said she liked a little snow. How heavy was the calling of the sea! It was like the chords of a majestic, mighty organ built into the walls of the world.

The children chattered about the artists, and pointed out their rooms yonder, specks of light in the dark hotel. Miss Ritter paid little attention to the artists. She was watching Mrs. Salt — and Rafè.

What ailed Rafè?

The child had been standing with his face pressed against the window where the curtain hung at half-mast; his yellow hair falling forward looked like a little crown. As he stood he began to croon and hum below his breath.

"He has n't sung *that* one before since father" — whispered Emma Eliza, but stopped, sobbing. Rafè was humming "Pull for the Shore."

But what ailed Rafè? He drew away from the window; the boy had turned quite pale; and yet

it could not be said that his transparent, delicate face showed fear. He went up slowly to his mother, and pulled her black dress.

"Marm, I see my fa—ther."

He pointed to the window, against which the storm pelted fast and furious.

"I 've frightened you, Rafè," said the mother, quietly. She had her great good sense. No one should allow her children to be afraid of their father as if he were a vulgar ghost. She patted Rafè, kissed him, and said, "Rafè must n't say such things."

"Marm," persisted the boy, "I saw my fa—ther."

"It 's the snow, Rafè, you see; it 's so white — like him. Rafè must not talk like silly people. Dead folks can't be seen by little boys. There! There 's that old latch again, Rafè. How it acts! Go and fix it, dear."

Like a child Rafè obeyed, but like a spirit he pondered, for Rafè had his dual life like the rest of us. Was it vulgar to see ghosts? Clearly it was necessary to push the wash-bench against the door; and though he looked like a spirit, he pushed like a boy. With his knee upon the bench, with

his hand upon the latch — But this was the moment when the child's shrill cry sounded and resounded through the house: —

"Oh, marm, I 've *got* my fa—ther!"

And, corpse or ghost or man, Henry Salt pushed in the door, hurled over the wash-bench, brushed aside Miss Ritter, strode over the children, and hearing, seeing, knowing nothing else, if alive or dead, whether in earth or heaven, he took his wife, in her black dress, into his arms.

FOR the most part, as we all know, such things are dreamed of. In Fairharbor they happen. The material of novelists and poets and playwrights, elsewhere woven of air or webbed of fancy to appease the burning human desire for "a good ending" to a smart fiction, becomes in Fairharbor, now and then, by God's ingenious will, the startling fact.

The sea had given up her dead. One month reckoned of the solemn number, Henry Salt, like

fishermen before him and fishermen, please God, to come after him, tossed by the vagaries of the sea and her toilers, had breasted his way to life and love.

He was a man of sparse words, except when in liquor or in temper, and he took but few, slowly spoken, and with the feint of carelessness or stolidity used by men of his kind to mask the rare and so confusing emotions of a lifetime, to tell his short, true tale: —

"We was lost in the fog and drove by the weather, and we was picked up six days to sea by a trader bound to Liverpool. That 's all. Her name was the Rose of the West — derned silly name for a merchantman. She took me an' kep' me — for my dory mate was frozen, and *him* she heaved overboard — till she hailed the Van Deusencock, of New York city, homeward bound. And that 's about all. The Van Deusencock she took me, and she got in at midnight, so I took the train to Boston, for I 'd lost the boat — she 'd 'a ben cheaper. Have you got a piece of squash pie in the house? I 'm hungry. I 'm glad to get home."

The fisherman paused with a final air, and if left to himself it is doubtful if he would have added

another word to his story from that day to this. Men of the sea are not so fond as traditionally believed of detailing their thrilling escapes. They suffer too much, and it is comfortable to forget.

"Well — yes," reluctantly, "I said my dory mate was froze. I did n't say who he was. I 've no objections, as I know of; only I hate to think of him. Job Ely was my dory mate. Yes. We was together to see to our trawls, and we drifted off in the fog — you could 'a cut it with a dull bread-knife! — and we could n't find our way back to the Abby E. Salt; and that 's all. I hate to think on 't, because he died first.

"There was a bite of ship-bread and water we had aboard the dory agin accident — I like to have something — so they kep' me. But it was almighty cold. Don't you remember the spell o' weather come along about Thanksgiving? Well, Job Ely froze. He froze to death. So I had to do the rowin'. But I kep' him, for I reckoned his mother 'd like to hev the body. I thought I 'd make shore along some o' them desarted beaches. So I kep' him, but I covered his face, and I could n't make shore, and it was God A'mighty cold. I rowed for six days — nigh to seven. I like to died — Nelly Jane,

don't take on so! Don't, my girl! Set in my lap awhile — never mind the children. Why, how you do shake and tremble! Why, look a-here! I DID N'T DO IT. I'm a livin' man. I've got you in these here arms. Bless the girl! Emma Eliza, what ails your marm? Has she took on this way all this while — for *me?* How peakèd she looks, and pale and saller — kind o' starved! There, Nelly Jane! Give me a mite o' suthin' for her, can't you? She dooz look starved. *Don't want nothin' but a kiss?* Here 's twenty of 'em! Who ever heard of a woman bein' starved for kisses? Why, what a girl you be! Why, this is like courtin' — old married folk like us. Why, sho! I don't know but it 's *wuth* a man's dyin' and comin' to life to court his own widder — this way.

"Well, yes, I did get pretty cold. Fact is, I froze my hands — froze 'em stiff. Fort'nate they friz to the oars, so I kep' a-rowin'. Time agin I give out, and like to lay down alongside poor Job and give it up; but then they was friz to the oars, so I *had* to keep a-rowin'. Cur'ous thing, now. One night, that last night before I sighted the Rose of the West, I was nigh about gone. You can't think how sick I was o' the sight o' Job — he

looked so. But I could n't bear to heave him over. Well, that night — I tell you the Sunday mornin' truth — I heerd Rafè singin' and Emma Eliza playin' to him on the instrument, and I heerd Rafè sing : —

'Pull for the shore, fa—ther.'

I heerd him plain as judgment, with the girl j'inin' in the chorus. But I heerd Rafè quite plain and loud,

'*Pull* for the shore, fa—ther, *pull* for the shore!'

Cur'ous, wa'n't it? *How 'd that hymn-tune know her chart,* navigatin' all them waters after me? Say? I heerd her. She need n't tell me. I heerd my little son singin' to his father — me 's good as a dead man — and by the livin' God I up an' *pulled!*

"What did you say, Rafè? I don't know. My hands was froze. Can't say what I can do for a livin' with 'em till I 've tried. Have to stay ashore, maybe. I hain't got so far as that. I don't mind my *hands,* so 's I 've got my folks.

"What did I holler back the night I went away? I don' know 's I know. You mean the night me and your marm had words? I had n't oughter had 'em. I thought on 't a sight. I hoped she 'd for-

get 'em. I kinder thought she would. '*So be I?*' I don't remember sayin' '*So be I.*' I misremember, Rafè. Guess it must 'a ben — yes, yes — sure enough. Sho! Yes, yes. I was a-callin' to poor Job — him ahead of me, for I was late — I says, 'Job Ely!' '*Job Ely!*' says I."

"I never says I knew you says so, fa—ther. I says, I think, I believe he said, 'So be I.' I *wanted* to say I knew you says so, fa—ther."

"I 'd oughter, Rafè. But I 'm afraid I did n't."

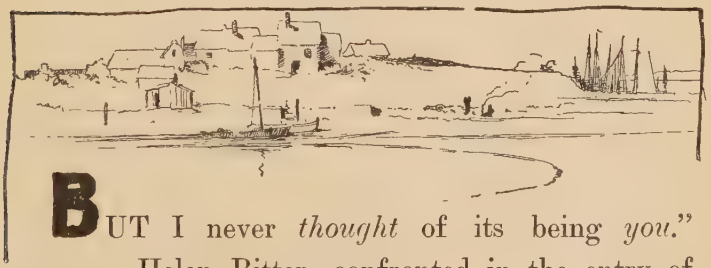
"Fa—ther, did you hear me say"— But Rafè stopped. He could not ask his father, "Did you hear me say, 'Marm says she 's sorry'?" The fine instinct of the fisherman's child was equal to that emergency. Rafè did not ask the question, and never will.

"Fa—ther," once again. Rafè came up and leaned against the big wooden rocking-chair wherein the two sat "courting" — the massive, puzzled, tender man, the little woman, laughing and crying in her widow's dress. "Fa—ther, what did you *think* about, when you thought you 'd be froze and drownded — all that time?"

"My son," said Henry Salt, after a long silence, which nobody, not even the baby, or the other

baby, seemed to care or dare to break — "my son, *I thought about your poor mother.* I see that latch wants a screw," added the fisherman, in his leisurely, matter-of-fact voice. "I guess I'll fix it after you've warmed the pie up, Ellen Jane."

But Emma Eliza, whether from such excess of earthly blessedness as to lead her to fear that one's heavenly prospects might be slighted, or whether from some vague sense of saying her prayers, or whether solely out of respect for the instrument, will never be known, danced madly to that melodious member of the family, and wailed out the general ecstasy in the lugubrious strains of "The Sweet By-and-by."



"BUT I never *thought* of its being *you*." Helen Ritter, confronted in the entry of the big empty summer hotel by that timely artist whose need of models had made Rafè the proud support of a fatherless family, dashed out these

words too impetuously to be recalled. "*You!* and *here* again!" She was dazzling with snow and color. She would have drawn herself to her full height splendidly, but his was higher. In that gloomy place, by the light of the lonely and smoky kerosene lamp swinging from the cold ceiling, it seemed indeed as if he outvied her in splendor. As she looked up, it was as if his mere physical presence would break her heart and grind it to powder — it was so long since she had seen him.

Their eyes clashed, retreated, advanced, united, and held gloriously. They defied each other, they adored each other, taunted and blessed, challenged and yielded, blamed and forgave, wounded and worshiped, as only a few men and women may in all the world, and love the better for it. The story of years was told without a word; the secret of anguish was said in silence; the torrent of joy poured past dumb lips, and there by the winter sea, on a Christmas Eve, in the dismal hotel entry, by the light of the smoky kerosene, two souls without speech or language met, perhaps for the first time in all their lives.

"I saw you through the window over there," he stammered, rapturously. "Oh, I saw you holding

the woman in your arms, and the child came up and kissed you. Why, I heard you sob. I was mean enough to listen. And I said, 'Why, *she 's a tender woman.* She never could have meant — She would forgive.' We misunderstood each other somehow, Helen. For Love's sake give me the right to find out how."

"Oh," said Helen Ritter, lifting her arms with a gentle and beautiful motion that might well have set a calmer man beside himself, "she told me I had never quarreled with the — man I — loved."

When they moved to shut the hotel door — for the snow was drifting in — and so stood for a moment between the storm without and the shelter within, Rafè and Emma Eliza at the instrument were singing shrilly,

"Give the wind time
To blow the man home!"

It seemed that Henry Salt had picked up another

verse to this long-suffering song upon the voyage, for, past the bowlders, over the thickets, under the willows, through the snow, borne, not drowned, by the pæan of the organ of the sea, thus roundly on the gale his bass trolled forth : —

"Give your life time
To blow the heart home ! "

"I want to sing it too," said Helen Ritter. He to whom her lightest wish was dearest law drew her furs about her, and led her out into the storm ; where, standing hand in hand, unseen, unheard, they joined their voices to the fisher-people's, and sang the wise, sweet words.

UD-128-541